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Denise Vowell is an honors graduate of Illinois State University (B.S. in Political Science and Philosophy in 1974) and the University of Texas School of Law (J.D. 1981), and a distinguished graduate of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (M.S. in National Resource Strategy in 1998).

She enlisted in the Army in 1973 while an undergraduate at Illinois State, and received a direct commission in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1974. After serving as a Military Police officer, she was selected for the Army's funded legal education program. While an Army officer, she served as a tort litigation attorney, prosecutor, defense counsel, chief legal officer, and as both a trial and appellate judge. She retired from the Army as the Chief Trial Judge in January, 2006.

Her publications include: The Fourth Amendment Warrant Requirement and Courts-Martial: Military Justice versus Military Readiness, 8 American Journal of Criminal Law 281 (Nov. 1980); To Determine an Appropriate Sentence: Sentencing in the Military Justice System, 14 Military Law Review 87 (Fall 1986); Using Operations and Maintenance Funds in Contingency Operations, Military Review, Vol. LXXX, p. 38, (Mar-Apr. 2000). In addition, she authored numerous published and unpublished opinions as an Associate Judge, U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals. She was a frequent guest lecturer on trial advocacy, evidence, and procedure at the Army's Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School.

She is a member of the National Association of Women Judges, and currently chairs the Military Courts committee. In her spare time, she advises a Senior Girl Scout troop and an all-girl Boy Scout Venturing Crew in the Bailey's Crossroads area of Northern Virginia where she resides. She is an avid backpacker and someday hopes to thru-hike the Appalachian Trail.